Lonely

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/28463547.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Adam (2009), Charlie Countryman (2013), Hannibal Extended Universe - Fandom
Relationship:	Nigel (Charlie Countryman)/Adam Raki
Characters:	Adam Raki, Nigel (Charlie Countryman)
Additional Tags:	Covid19 Lockdown, Christmas, New Year's Eve, Online Friendship, Secret Identity, Sort Of, Developing Friendships, Alternate Universe - Neighbors, Falling In Love, sharing a bubble, Closeted Character, gay Nigel, closeted Nigel, New Year's Kiss, Time Skips, Happy Ending, Hannibal Extended Universe, Podfic Welcome, do not copy to another site
Language:	English
Series:	Part 117 of Tiger's Mads x Hugh Rare Pair fics
Collections:	MonthlyRareMeat
Stats:	Published: 2020-12-31 Words: 5,330 Chapters: 1/1

Lonely

by TigerPrawn

Summary

To cope with the unbearable loneliness of lockdown, Adam joins an online friend finding service. He also meets his neighbour, Nigel.

29 November

Adam stared blankly at the screen, his fingers hovering over the keyboard.

He had been considering signing up for the Network ever since his dad died, but then he met Beth and now she was gone too. It was so hard to be so suddenly and completely isolated. But all the more so for the difficulties he already had with connecting with people.

In the end it was the weeks of lockdown that had him browsing the site and trying to work up the nerve.

It seemed like the lowest level of expectation and yet it was more than he'd like. But with now not even being able to see Harlan, Adam was so alone and cut off. Any form of contact, even if he made a complete fool of himself, was better than nothing.

Adam took a breath and then put his hand on the mouse, watching the tracker on screen turn into a hand as it rolled over the *submit* button.

He clenched his jaw and clicked.

The moment he did it he moved back from the laptop as though stung. He could see the little icon saying it was working, ‘locating your new friend.’

Adam quickly closed down the lid and jumped back from his chair, standing in the middle of the room staring at the machine as he wrung his hands.

*

Nigel blinked his eyes open, woken by the notification sound on his phone.

It was fucking loud. And Nigel had no idea why it would be going off now, at-

He looked over at his clock and saw it was almost midday. So perhaps it wasn’t the foul he’d thought it was, but the fact that anyone was messaging him before midday meant it was clearly someone who didn’t know him. Or-

“Shit.” He sat up immediately in bed and grabbed the phone.

It had been months since he’d started over in the US. New identity, new life, new city and new job. Not that it had kept him out of trouble. He’d easily fallen back into his old ways, until he got picked up for drug possession. Luckily nothing worse so he got off with community service and a warning to keep his nose clean or risk deportation. That was something he’d taken seriously. He didn’t want to end up back in another shithole like Bucharest, not when New York was working out so well.

He tapped through to the message, hoping it was his boss saying there was some work for him. He’d technically been furloughed but without pay, until this shit all ended and hopefully there was a job to go back to. Working the bar at a business that had been closed down until further notice meant that he was reliant on any odd shifts they had moving random shit, like beer barrels that needed flushing and his savings. Thankfully, even with the exchange rate from Leu, it was a substantial amount of ill gotten gains.

Even so, Nigel liked to keep busy. He’d tried to find work as a delivery driver, which seemed one of the few jobs going. Everyone was getting everything delivered. First over Halloween, through Thanksgiving and now heading towards Christmas too. Because apparently they were about to hit the most wonderful fucking time of the year. But no joy. It seemed any job that was going was immediately gone.

Nigel sighed and lay back, phone in hand clicking through now. It wasn’t a message, it was a notification from the app he’d had to download for the Network thing he’d been ordered to sign up to as part of his community service.

A fucking app talking to shut ins and lonely old people, it had only grown all the more popular since lockdown had started.

Of course, he understood that there were a lot of people working from home. Or having to care for people, and generally not able to get out and about. And if he had to admit it, yeah maybe he did have a soft spot for one little old lady in Queens that had been connected with him.

She reminded him of his grandmother.

But it wasn't her.

New Connection the notification read. Nigel sighed and swiped into the app.

"Oh." Nigel's brows shot up. Most of the people he'd been connected with were much older, but this was someone ten years younger than him. Given that it was matched by the person most likely to connect based on information submitted, the few younger people he had talked to were ex-cons and this guy was some sort of science nerd.

As with all the profiles, the avatar was a random silhouette that you could change the colour of. He'd left his own as the red it had come with, slightly amused that it made him look like Clue's Miss Scarlet. But this guy had changed his to some sort of custom starscape in a person shape.

His username was PlaybillReader and the rest of the info was basic and yet also seemed fastidiously done. Every single field completed even if with just the smallest amount of information, including all his interests, likes and dislikes.

Looking at it, Nigel was baffled. He had been matched with old ladies who had originally come from Romania, he had been matched with ex-cons like himself. But this one? He wasn't sure what they could possibly have in common. Maybe it was a mistake?

2 December

Nigel made his way down to the laundry room, a basket under one arm as he used his free hand to light the cigarette between his lips.

He really wasn't sure what to do with himself with all this free time. It was frustrating. He'd taken up playing stupid fucking games on his phone and talking more and more to his connections on The Network.

Most seemed to be in a worse position than him with money or work, or even health. And he had to admit he was worried about Sofia, the old lady in Queens. He reminded her every day not to leave her apartment unless absolutely necessary, that he would get stuff sent to her if it came to that.

The only one who seemed remotely okay was PlaybillReader. He seemed kinda detached from the whole thing, like he'd always lived in a bit of a bubble. He worked from home, for some space science gig, and he was comfortably situated. But he was so fucking lonely. He'd even said it outright a couple of times. His dad died not long before all this shit went down. Poor kid. He seemed like he'd been pretty reclusive anyhow, and then his dad died and now

he was a shut in. So whilst in some ways not a lot had changed, he'd also lost all human contact at a time when he needed support.

Thinking about it, Nigel considered as he pushed through the laundry room door, he talked to PlaybillReader more than anyone. The others had families and interests, but that kid was so damn lonely he just wanted someone at the end of the line any time he could. Which was okay by Nigel. He liked talking to him, he was a character. Funny and sweet, sort of a boy next door, Nigel imagined.

"Fuck!"

Nigel nearly dropped his basket, shocked to see the young man from the apartment beneath his standing next to one of the washers wearing just pants and a jacket, no shirt.

"Oh!" The kid responded and grabbed instantly to both pull his jacket closed and for the mask he had set on the side.

"Relax. I haven't left this building in weeks and haven't so much as had a runny nose." Nigel spoke gruffly as he pushed into the room and then went to a machine in the far corner, away from his neighbour.

"Usual symptoms include a cough and fever." The young man frowned at him as he pulled on his mask.

"Not had those either. Fit as a fiddle," Nigel replied as he took a drag on his cigarette, and that earned him another frown which made him chuckle.

"I'll be gone in a minute," Nigel continued, eyeing the guy up and down as he dropped his laundry into the top loader and then poured in the soap. He quickly set it going as his neighbour moved his laundry from a washer to a dryer, keeping a cautious eye on him.

And yet, when Nigel stepped back towards the door, expecting to go back upstairs until the wash was done, his neighbour spoke up.

"Wait, are you, um… You live upstairs?" The young man spoke out, surprising Nigel. "You want to stay and talk for awhile?"

He turned and looked at his neighbour and saw the lonely desperation there.

"Sure," Nigel agreed. Not one to turn down a pretty face, he also understood the loneliness that came with being stuck in this place.

He wandered back to his machine and hopped up on top of the one next to it and looking expectantly at the young man who finally gave him something of a bashful smile as he removed his mask again and said-

"My name's Adam."

12 December

Adam logged off from his work for the day and then looked at his phone where it sat on the kitchen counter.

His fingers twitched.

He found more and more since signing up to the Network, that he was breaking or bending his routine in ways he actually wasn't uncomfortable with. After all, reading and sending messages was something he could fit in between other things. And he increasingly did.

Biting his lower lip, Adam stood and went to the kitchen counter, flicking on his phone and seeing the two messages.

One from his neighbour, Nigel. And the other from Delightful@55hole, who he had been connected with on the Network. Adam felt his heart flutter and he wasn't sure which of the men made him feel that way. Perhaps both?

He looked at the message from Delighful@55hole first, just continuing a conversation they'd been having about how theatre might function post lockdown. Delighful@55hole had been to orchestral performances but never the theatre, and Adam was enjoying turning him on to it. He'd even sent a few links to plays that theatres had released online and Delighful@55hole seemed to enjoy those.

>>I saw this thing online with an outdoor theatre. Maybe that would be possible in the summer. Maybe something we can do together :D <<

Adam felt his face heat and his pulse race. It was even harder to tell in writing whether someone was flirting than in person, but even if it wasn't flirtation, Adam enjoyed making plans. It was nice to have someone to make those plans with and talk to like this.

And then there was Nigel. After their initial conversation a couple of weeks earlier, Adam's neighbour had suggested they form a bubble together. Neither were going out anywhere and both had been isolated long enough to know neither were infected.

Adam had been hesitant at first, concerned that Nigel was only offering out of pity, given that it seemed obvious how lonely Adam was. But then he figured that maybe Nigel was just lonely as well, and it would only be neighbourly to help each other.

In the last couple of weeks, he'd come to find that he really did enjoy Nigel's company, despite how different they might seem.

Adam shook the thoughts from his mind and replied to Delighful@55hole -

>>I would like that <<

Then flicked over to his text messages.

::Hey neighbour, dinner tonight at yours? My fucking grocery delivery had to be rescheduled::

Adam smiled. Nigel was foul mouthed and invited himself over an awful lot, but Adam didn't mind. Once Nigel realised he had his work hours and then would have a shower before bed every night, he seemed to at least time his visits in and around that. Which was a lot less disruptive for Adam. In fact Adam found Nigel to be a much more considerate person than he might have guessed by looking at his gruff appearance.

And, it was nice to physically have someone around. As much as Adam was enjoying the minimal social pressure of the Network, his apartment felt so big and empty with his dad gone.

::Yes, I have plenty for both of us:: Adam replied.

::Great. I've ordered more of the mac & cheese you like in my grocery order to pay you back for last time anyway. See you at seven::

When seven rolled around, Nigel arrived with a four pack of beer and a cigarette hanging out of his mouth. His smile, as always, made Adam feel like jelly inside.

"Hey kiddo, did you see this stuff online about this Great Conjunction thing tomorrow? We should try and get your telescope up to the roof." Nigel said as he made his way to the kitchen and put his beer in the fridge. "What do you say?"

Nigel looked at him, smiling expectantly and Adam nodded with a smile of his own. Warmth spreading in his chest even as Nigel stubbed out what remained of his cigarette on the side of the kitchen sink.

"I think that sounds great."

20 December

Nigel got up, made breakfast, and then sat down at his little two seater table and started scrolling through his phone as he ate.

It was his new routine, logging into the Network to see if anyone had messaged him. He'd also set a reminder for some people, prompting him to message them if he hadn't heard from them in a day or two. Just to check in on how they were doing.

Who'd have thought he would become the sort of person that fucking gave a damn? But these were strange times and he'd actually started to care about the fate of these practical strangers. Maybe it was something he might always have been capable of if he hadn't fallen into a life of fuckery as soon as he was old enough to snort a line. Or, not old enough really. Not that it mattered now.

There was a message from Sofia checking in, though this time her tone was cheekier than usual. Which was saying something, because some of the Romanian she would jokingly throw at him was not for polite company.

>>Tell me more about your neighbour. ;) <<

Nigel blinked and swallowed, an image of Adam immediately coming to mind.

Had he mentioned him that much to Sofia? He remembered telling her about the night they went up to the roof to see the conjunction, which had been pretty fucking amazing. And she had joked that they were on a date. But had he said much since then?

He didn't want anyone to get the wrong idea about the man, and he was pretty sure that the decades he'd spend deeply closetting himself in order to not fucking die in Bucharest was still working out for him.

>>What about him?<< Nigel had intended his reply to be dismissive but realised it might have sounded defensive instead.

>>Oh, I don't know. Last time you told me you couldn't talk as you were having dinner with him and mentioned that his eyes were so beautiful, deep and blue that it was like standing in Constanța and looking out over the Black Sea<<

Nigel blinked and did a double take, tempted for a moment to scroll back up and check whether he'd fucking said that. Because God knows he'd thought it.

>>I never fucking said that<<

>>Not in so many words ;)<<

Nigel closed the message, planning to ignore the old busy body for the rest of the day to teach her a lesson. Though he knew that if she messaged again later he would immediately check it just in case she needed anything.

Damn he was whipped. Old ladies and ex cons and that bloody PlaybillReader who was just too damn nice to be true. In fact, he reminded Nigel a little of Adam. Maybe all nice people were just like that? Not like he had a lot of experience of them.

Nigel was about to put his phone down and finish his breakfast when PlaybillReader's icon popped up. He opened the message.

>>Could I ask you for some advice? I don't really have any other friends I can ask<<

Nigel frowned, instantly concerned, as he was with all his connections on the Network. Or so he might tell himself.

>>Sure, is everything ok?<<

>>Yes, everything's fine. I just need some advice on dating<<

Nigel sucked in a breath and winced. He was not only the last person who should give advice on that subject, but he wasn't sure he wanted to. Fuck, it would be like Adam asking for dating advice. Not like he was going to let anything happen there, but he also didn't want to have to watch Adam hooking up with some woman.

He'd already told Nigel all about Beth, who had lived in this apartment before Nigel. It seemed the one good thing to come out of that was that Adam had ended up with a great new job, which should be in California, but with the pandemic he'd been stuck having to work

from home for now until it was safe to relocate across the country. Nigel sometimes daydreamed what it would be like to live in California. Plenty of bar jobs there as anywhere else once this shit was all over.

Nigel clenched his jaw.

>>Dating? In a pandemic? Not a great idea XD<<

Nigel tried to laugh it off.

>>It's okay, it's someone I live with. But I don't know how to ask them out. Especially as we can't really go anywhere on an actual date. And, how can I tell if they are interested?<<

>>Have you tried just asking if they are interested?<< Nigel replied, not meaning to sound as blunt as it came across.

>>Is that what you would do?<<

>>Yeah, communication is key<< Nigel lied.

But then, his situation was different. So what if he liked Adam? So what if maybe he liked him more than he should like a friendly neighbour? He wasn't going to freak the guy out and ruin their friendship by simultaneously coming out to him and asking him if he's interested in dating a fucking man.

Nigel shook his head.

>>Look, if you live together then things could get awkward if they aren't interested. So maybe first you should just drop a few hints<<

>>I'm not good at dropping hints<<

Nigel winced, not wanting to leave PlaybillReader hanging with this one but just as concerned about making it worse.

>>Well, does it seem like they might be interested in you too?<<

>>I'm not sure. I'm on the autism spectrum and it makes it difficult for me to know if a person is interested or I'm just seeing what I want to see<<

Nigel frowned, wondering if he should google the syndrome before he carried on, but advice was advice, right?

>>Okay. Maybe just wait and see if they make a move then? Or wait until you're no longer locked down together and can escape from each other if it doesn't go well<<

>>Maybe I'll just wait for now. Thank you for your advice, I appreciate it.<<

Nigel set his phone down with a sigh.

On the one hand he hoped it worked out for him. But on the other, Nigel was jealous as all hell. And he wasn't even sure whether he was jealous that someone might be interested in PlaybillReader or jealous that PlaybillReader might get some action when he wasn't.

Nigel pushed the remnants of his breakfast aside just as his phone alert sounded again.

This time it was Adam.

:: I found all our old Christmas decorations in my dad's room. I thought maybe we could hang some around the building to cheer everyone up::

::That sounds like a great idea! I'll be around after you finish work::

25 December

Adam had considered spending Christmas with Harlan.

The old family friend had been checking in with him, messaging him a few times a week, and to Adam he was practically family. But the reality was, if he and Harlan met up, then he would need to isolate again before being able to spend time with Nigel once more.

And, selfishly, Adam didn't want that.

So it was a relief when, a few days before Christmas, Harlan called him to explain he was spending the holidays with the long lost love he had rekindled with as they had ended up moving in together to see themselves through all this. He seemed concerned about Adam, but Adam had been nothing but happy for Harlan and had explained that he and his neighbour had formed a bubble.

Harlan had been relieved that the neighbour was a man, not wanting to worry about another "Beth situation" as he called it.

And Nigel had been more than happy to accept Adam's invitation to Christmas lunch. Which had made Adam happy in a way that made him feel light and giddy.

He felt a flutter in his chest and wondered whether or not Nigel felt the same. It was different to when he was with Beth.

He had really liked Beth, and he'd felt that flutter too, or at least something like it. He had loved her, in his own way, but it wasn't the way she had wanted to be loved. It had taken a while to understand that, and he wasn't surprised when she moved out, moving back with her mother to deal with the fall out of her dad going to prison.

The flutter he felt with Nigel was different. With Beth it had started with a sexual attraction as much as anything. And whilst he was most definitely sexually attracted to Nigel, his affection for the man and his friendship had developed just as quickly alongside that. Adam considered him a close friend.

And, really, the most different thing between Nigel and Beth, was the way Nigel treated him. He didn't feel like a bother to Nigel, or worry that he was doing something inappropriate. He

hadn't fit into the boyfriend mould that Beth had wanted him to. But with Nigel there was no mould, he had no expectations of Adam. Though Adam realised that was likely because they were just friends.

"Ho ho ho, motherfuckers," Nigel grinned as he let himself into Adam's apartment, nudging the door shut behind him with his foot.

Adam shook his head, "That quote is incorrect."

Nigel shrugged and set down his beer in the kitchen as well as a Christmas gift bag he was holding.

"We didn't say if we were doing gifts." Nigel didn't look at him as he spoke, simply pushing the bag across the counter so that it was in front of Adam.

"Oh, I… I wasn't sure. But I made you something." Adam replied, opening the bag.

"Damn. Made? Hope you're not too disappointed with this then." Nigel grinned at him and watched as he reached into the bag.

Adam pulled out a small book and frowned down at it before starting to laugh. He had mentioned over a week ago that maybe he should try to learn Romanian as it seemed only fair. But he hadn't been expecting a little book of Romanian curse words.

"I figured this was a good place to start." Nigel grinned.

Adam laughed again, "Yes, at least now I might understand some of what you say." He joked.

They continued to smile at each, and Adam felt his chest swell and his cheeks heat. Maybe Nigel did feel this way too? He considered just asking him, but he remembered how awkward that had been with Beth, and he had a friend who had told him that maybe it wasn't the best idea whilst they were stuck in lockdown.

Nigel was the first to look away, despite it usually being Adam as he often found it difficult to hold eye contact. And that left Adam with a weird pain. He hadn't wanted Nigel to look away.

"I'll get your gift," Adam said, disappearing into his bedroom to fetch it.

He came back to find Nigel setting the small table with cutlery and one of the Christmas candles that had been on the sideboard. If it had been any time other than Christmas, the table setting might have looked romantic.

"Here," Adam said, holding out the small item wrapped in tissue paper. "I haven't made one in a while."

Nigel cocked his head and took the package, holding it gently as he unwrapped it.

The small robot was the sort Adam had made as a hobby for many years and he'd designed similar things when he'd worked for the toy company.

“Wow, you made this?” Nigel turned it over in his hands, where it looked pretty small. Such beautiful, strong hands.

Adam swallowed. “Yeah, do you like it?”

“I’ve never had someone make something for me before.” Nigel’s voice cracked as he looked up and Adam wasn’t sure how to respond to that.

Nigel cleared his throat and stepped closer. “Can I hug you?”

Adam swallowed and nodded.

When Nigel pulled him close, Adam sank into his arms, holding his breath.

They stood for a minute but then the timer on the oven sounded and they jumped apart.

31 December

It was New Year already and Nigel had barely seen Adam all week. Almost fucking midnight and a shitty end to a shitty year.

They’d only seen each other once actually, as they passed in the hallway on the way to and from the laundry room. And that had just been polite mumbled words.

After their hug, Christmas lunch had been a little quiet and then they’d watched a movie in silence. It wasn’t exactly awkward, more like neither of them knew what to say.

Or maybe they did but just didn’t want to say it. Certainly it looked like Adam was trying to hold something in and Nigel was desperately hoping it wasn’t a rejection. After they said goodbye in the early evening he kept waiting for Adam to text him and say Nigel had made him uncomfortable and he didn’t want to see him again. But nothing.

Instead Nigel was inundated with messages from PlaybillReader. Explaining that he and his housemate had stopped talking too and he wanted to talk to them but he was worried that if he did he would confess how much he liked them and was worried what might happen if he did.

>>I’m sad that I will be alone for New Year<<

Nigel looked at the message for a few minutes, smoking out on his balcony in the fucking freezing cold, unsure how to answer.

He’d been trying to be positive for his friend. But it was so hard when he’d been feeling so fucking miserable all week. And that week had felt like a fucking lifetime.

The whole month had gone by so slowly, it felt like he’d known Adam for years, but this silence between them just made him realise how short a time it had really been.

And yet? Fuck, he was falling for the man. He wanted him, desperately.

In the end Nigel stubbed out his cigarette and went back inside before tapping his reply.

>>Me too, friend<<

>>Maybe I'm better off just meeting people on the Network and not making friends in real life. I'm not very good at it.<<

Nigel wanted to deny it and be encouraging but instead responded-

>>I understand. Maybe we can meet up in the summer, like I said? Even if we have to sit two meters apart<<

>>I'd like that.<<

Then followed a picture file, and Nigel couldn't help but sit down on the edge of his sofa as he waited for it to be received.

They had discussed early on the sending of photos, and PlaybillReader said that he wasn't comfortable sharing photos of himself with a stranger. Which was fair and it never came up again.

Maybe Nigel would finally see what this sweet young man looked like?

When the image finally popped up, it was of some New Year bunting strung across a room, followed by-

>>Hope you have a Happy New Year and that 2021 is better for everyone.<<

Nigel smiled and was about to reply when he looked at the photo again. The angle was distracting but the closer he looked at it the more he knew that room. He just didn't usually see it from this direction… Because it was taken at the table from the seat Adam always sat in.

Nigel's breath caught in his throat and his palms began to sweat. What was going on? Was someone playing fucking games with him?

It couldn't…

His hands were trembling as he tapped out-

>>Adam?<<

The immediate reply came back-

>>Yes?<<

Followed even quicker by-

>>I never told you my name, how do you know my name?<<

“Fuck,” Nigel spat the word, his heart racing as he thought how Adam might be feeling right now thinking that somehow this stranger he’d been talking with knew who he was.

Nigel stood so fast the sofa pushed back on the floorboards a little, making a scraping sound, and he wasn’t sure he even closed the door behind him as he began to take the stairs two at a time down to Adam’s apartment.

“Adam,” Nigel called as he started to knock impatiently on the door.

It took a moment but then the door opened, Adam with eyes wide and his phone in his hand and television playing a New Year broadcast in the background.

“Nigel?”

“It’s me.” Nigel said quickly, trying to catch his breath.

Adam looked confused for a moment and Nigel moved into the apartment without waiting to be asked and closed the door behind him. He turned and took Adam by the shoulders, holding him there until Adam met his eyes.

“Delightful asshole, that’s me. On the Network. We’ve been talking. For weeks.” He glanced up at the New Year bunting and nodded his head towards it. “You’re PlaybillReader.”

He could feel Adam trembling, shaking a little in his grasp.

“I didn’t know.” Nigel clarified quickly. “Not until I saw the bunting in the photo.”

Maybe it made sense then, Nigel considered. Maybe the Network had connected them because they lived in the same area. The same fucking building?!

“You…” Adam started and trailed off. He looked like he was going to cry, and Nigel wasn’t sure if he was upset or happy or simply overwhelmed. He just knew he wanted to comfort him.

Taking the chance, Nigel pulled Adam into his arms and Adam went, quickly throwing his own arms around Nigel and clinging to him.

He was shaking now as he practically whispered in Nigel’s ear, “I was asking for advice, about… about dating and…”

“Please dear fucking god tell me that the friend you live with that you want to date is me,” Nigel forced the words out with a chuckle but his heart was hammering and he was preparing himself for the worst.

“Nigel,” Adam gasped his name and pulled back, not looking at him almost as though he was considering what to do next.

A moment later, Adam was kissing him. Just a chaste kiss before he pulled back, and then he leaned in once more and before Nigel could even react, Adam was kissing him again, his arms around Nigel’s neck.

Nigel moaned into it and opened his mouth, deepening the kiss as they held each other tight.

It was a few minutes before they broke, gasping for breath, shaking and chuckling.

“Happy fucking New Year, Adam.” Nigel managed, but Adam didn’t reply, he just kissed him again as the countdown to New Year began on the television.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!